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REPORT

OF THE

Committee on Sanitation and Public Health

TO THE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF NEW HAVEN

ON

“THE NECESSITY FOR A PUBLIC CON-
VENIENCE STATION”

BY

WILLIAM H. CARMALT, M.D.

Member of the Committee

FOREWORD

At its meeting of October 27th, 1915, the New Haven Chamber of Commerce accepted the report of Dr. William H. Carmalt for the Committee on Sanitation and Public Health with regard to "The Necessity for a Public Convenience Station in New Haven," and authorized the Committee on Sanitation and Public Health to appear before the Board of Aldermen in support of a petition to establish such station and in favor of an appropriation to provide the same.

This report was ordered printed and sent to all members of the Chamber of Commerce.

CHARLES E. JULIN,
Secretary.



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OCTOBER 26, 1915.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Chamber of Commerce:

At the outset I wish, following the example of the United States Government, as shown in the installation of these stations in Washington, D. C., to adopt the name of "convenience" stations instead of the much less accurate and less euphonious name in common use. They are "convenience" stations in the proper use of the word. The term in ordinary use is a misnomer.

The information here given has been obtained, *first*, from correspondence with health and municipal authorities in New York City, Washington, D. C., Scranton, Pa., Springfield, Mass., and Hartford, Conn.; *second*, from a monograph on (so-called) Public Comfort Stations addressed to the Commission on the City Plan to the Mayor and Court of Common Council of the City of Hartford in 1911 by Mr. Frederick L. Ford, at that time City Engineer of that city, now our City Engineer; and I beg to state I found it an extremely valuable document, containing full and interesting information on all points of the subject, illustrated with many views of stations of this character in this country and in Europe. I haven't hesitated to quote from this and also from a typewritten report kindly sent me by Mr. A. R. McGonegal, Inspector of Plumbing of Washington, D. C.; and, *third*, from personal inspection of such stations both in process of building and completed, in operation, in the cities of Scranton, Springfield and Hartford; with consultations with the architects in each of these cities.

The first point to consider perhaps is the necessity for such a station here in New Haven; and as a reason for this report I have to say that Secretary Julin informed me that in the responses to his circular of a few weeks ago, addressed to each member of the Chamber of Commerce, enquiring as to what each one regarded as the most urgent public need of New Haven,—second only to that of a better railroad station, a public "convenience" station situated near the center of the city was considered to be the most urgent. You may also be aware that the Trades Council has petitioned to the Board of Aldermen to provide such a station. The Committee of the Board before which the writer had the honor to appear apparently wished to know if he thought the community really wanted it; if there was a public demand for it. The information hereafter given will be the reply to this, and aside from these somewhat vague statements I beg to offer the experience of other cities where decent, up-to-date sanitary public convenience stations have been placed in properly accessible situations. The writer must confess that until getting from authoritative sources the actual number of users, he was doubtful if there was other than good sanitary and health reasons

for their establishment; but where accurate statistics have been obtained, he has been positively astounded at the demand for their use. Few cities keep accounts of the use of these stations, but I quote from where this was done.

In the six stations installed in the City of Brooklyn, N. Y., there were yearly over 12,000,000 actual users, 2,000,000 (+) for each station! Washington, D. C., with three stations, states that during one fiscal year the total number was over $2\frac{1}{2}$ million users for each station per year; 7,300 per day, 406 per hour, over $6\frac{1}{2}$ per minute, for the time the stations were open. I have no reports of actual figures from other cities, but many state that having started by having their stations open 16 or 18 hours daily they have been obliged, owing to the demands, to keep them open all the time, day and night. Mr. Ford's report states that (many) in New York City, in Brooklyn, in Boston, Mass., Cleveland, Ohio, Detroit, Mich., find themselves obliged to keep open the whole 24 hours, and I learn the same is the case in Hartford, Conn. It does not seem necessary to quote farther to show that, wherever installed, they have demonstrated a public necessity for their existence. The writer allows himself to query, why the public officials of New Haven have delayed so long in this so important a matter of public health, to say nothing of convenience, or can have any doubt if the public wants it.

These stations are of two types, above and underground, the former of various degrees of architectural ugliness, all more or less conspicuous, sometimes even to offensiveness. Those underground are of course free from these objections, are equally serviceable, and being more economical in construction, are more desirable; besides, the expense of a site being avoided, the ground overhead may, if desired, be utilized for other public buildings. Indeed, it may be under a street, as is the case in some cities, or under an open park in others; in no way whatever interfering with the legitimate uses of these places, either as a grass plot in a park or as a thoroughfare for travel in a street.

In a city where the sewer connections are available, the matter of the disposal of the sewage is of no difficulty; if, however, the sewer connection or other drainage be not adequate, a pump may readily be installed to eliminate this objection. Where there is power, as is the case in most public buildings for carrying elevators, and in this case for running a ventilating fan, the extra expense of a pump is but a small item. When one considers the freedom from odors with which the most elaborate hotels and fastidious private clubhouses are fitted up with water closets and urinals in basements, it is evident that it is simply a matter of attention and care to keep these underground stations perfectly sanitary and odorless. The writer was careful to note this in both the Springfield and Hartford stations. There was not a suggestion of an unpleasant odor of any kind in either, though in actual use while he was present; neither was there any attempt

to disguise the natural odors by substituting some other more agreeable.

The ideal location for such a station is on a street corner, where separate entrances on opposite sides may be had for the sexes, leading down to their respective male and female compartments, the attendant's quarters and power plants being placed between. There is thus complete privacy.

It is not proposed in this communication to advocate any especial location, but for an underground station there are five or six places in the immediate neighborhood of Church and Chapel and Elm Streets, any one of which is suitable for an underground station. Either of the two lower corners of the Green, at Church and Chapel or at Church and Elm streets, is capable of being so utilized. Another situation is the vacant lot on Elm Street, between the County Court House and the Ives Public Library, with the entrance for women on the Library side and that for the men on the Court House side, the grass plot between being left as it is, or utilized in the future, if occasion arises. It has also been suggested to utilize for this purpose the space under the present public urinal on Court Street, between the police building and the Metzger Café, in front of the offices of the Fire Department. Another location suggested by Mr. Ford is on Church Street, under or in front of the recently acquired former County Court House; still another may be considered in the vacant space on Court Street between the rear of the new post office and the new fire engine house. Objections may be made to each of these places, and, again, each has certain advantages, but it is neither decent nor right that any one, whether an inhabitant or a visitor to the city, should be obliged to depend upon private sources for relief from these natural necessities; women to go to department stores with unsupervised and more or less unsanitary closets, or suffer greatly in health, as every physician knows to be the case; the men to go to saloons, where the impulse to buy an undesired drink or a cigar in return for the convenience is, to a certain extent, forced upon them—an especially objectionable feature in the case of young men and boys—a more or less active incentive to intoxication and a temptation that should not be presented. It is sincerely to be hoped that this honorable body of business men will put itself on record as urging upon the municipal authorities to at once take steps to remedy this pressing evil.

Without going into unnecessary details as to construction, fixtures, fittings, etc., it has been found that a structure about 50 x 60 feet is the usual size; that the compartment for men should contain urinals, water closets and lavatories, with hot and cold water, and sanitary paper towels and soap, free; and a limited number of pay closets, these each with its own lavatory and water closet and clean towel. That the compartment for women should also have both free and pay closets; there should

be on this side one booth, which, together with a closet of the usual size, should have a small closet for a child; and on this side also a rest booth to contain, besides its own water closet and lavatory, a lounge, preferable of woven cane, sufficiently large to allow the attendance of a surgeon. Besides the usual equipment of towels and soap, the female attendant should also have a supply of sanitary napkins for sale. It is not necessary to discuss here the number of urinals, water closets, free and pay, on the respective sides; these are details to be determined when the establishment of the station itself is decided upon.

The cost of construction must vary considerably, not only as between above and underground construction, but also, as for different underground stations, depending upon the character of the earth excavation, the sewer connections, etc. The general report is that the underground stations cost to construct from \$20,000 to \$25,000, completed in every detail. The architect of the station at Scranton, Mr. John S. Duckworth, who was most polite in showing me the incompleeted station there and in letting me have the use of his detailed plans and specifications, told me that the city appropriated \$24,000 for the station and that, as it was now approaching completion, he saw the way clear to return about \$2,000 unexpended into the city treasury. This underground station, built over a former swamp, is of reinforced concrete with a layer of waterproofing included in the walls, the whole composing a box completely covered in below, above, and on all sides with the above concrete and waterproofing walls; the size roughly 50' x 60' x 12': it had its own heating and power plant, but is to be lighted by electricity from the city supply. Those at Springfield and Hartford, being situated under municipal buildings, obtain all these accessions from the general city supply and the cost of maintenance is correspondingly lessened. This cost is made up by the wages of attendants; by the heat, power and light used; and from supplies furnished, these being principally towels, soap and laundry work. The cost of attendants is much the largest item, that being dependent again upon the price of labor in the city and the number of hours employed. Both male and female attendants are necessary. In Washington, D. C., male attendants cost from \$2 to \$2.50 per day each, females about half that amount. In Springfield the male attendants get \$13.50 per week, the females \$9 per week. In Scranton the whole cost of maintenance is estimated to be \$4,000 per year, with a deduction of half that amount in receipts for pay closets, towels, packages checked, concession for bootblack stand and perhaps telephone booths.

In Washington, D. C., the attendants are required to record upon cards, with which they are provided, all details of attendance and supplies, and from these much useful information is obtained, from which I have freely quoted; the pamphlet by Mr. Ford also contains accurate and satisfactory data. In Wash-

ington, where there are three stations, the present cost of operation (maintenance) is stated to average about \$258 per month, or \$3,420 per year each, including all charges for wages, repairs, laundry, electrical current and general supplies. No mention is specifically made of heat here, but as electrical current is mentioned it is fair to suppose that heat and power is included. Quoting Mr. Ford's pamphlet, the average yearly cost of operating the underground station on Boston Common for four years from 1904 to 1907, inclusive, was \$6,281; for a similar station in Worcester, Mass., the total expense for the year was \$3,700. At the underground station in Longacre Square, New York City, the total expense for the year was \$4,800. Taking account of the total number using the stations, the Washington authority states, the total cost of operation amounted to 3 $\frac{7}{10}$ mills per person using it; and if fees were deducted this was reduced to 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ mills. This matter of pay closets and other returns for especial service rendered is one to be reckoned upon. There certainly is no objection to such sources of revenue from persons willing to pay small fees for individual attention. In Washington, D. C., the receipts from these sources amounts to about \$200 per month per station and are increasing every month. Taking this from the amount above given of \$285 per month expense, reduces the actual expense to \$85 per month. It was expected at Scranton that the cost of maintenance would be reduced one-half from these sources. Mr. Ford's monograph states that in London and Liverpool certain of the stations are actual sources of revenue. At one station mentioned in London the expenses were \$3,600, while the receipts were \$8,700, making a revenue of \$5,100 from that station. At Liverpool the average expenses at one station were \$1,600, the receipts \$2,300, making a profit of \$700. While such returns are not recorded in this country, certainly the cost of maintenance may reasonably be expected to be cut down a considerable amount if you make and keep the stations attractive to respectable people, who will be willing to pay reasonable fees for individual attention.

It is not considered to be the province of this report to go into the details of administration and management, qualifications and rules for attendants, regulation of pay closets, hours open, etc., but the writer wishes to emphasize the necessity of having the interior construction such that it may be kept absolutely clean and sanitary, and to a certain extent attractive, certainly not repulsive. Terrazzo floors as nearly white as practicable, white marble or white glazed brick walls and partitions, so that they may be hosed out daily or oftener and the slightest dirt detected. An aseptic surgical operating amphitheatre, not the filthy toilet rooms of the usual railroad station, should be the model for both compartment and attendants. The attendant should dress in a white uniform, which should be scrupulously clean. The writer could but contrast the difference in these respects between two of the stations

he inspected—in the one the walls of the entrance steps were constructed of white glazed tile, the same as the walls of the compartment, and entering the compartment he found a quiet, dignified attendant with a clean, fresh white uniform and cap, speaking when addressed and not otherwise, moving quietly about, wiping up the tracks unavoidably brought in from the muddy street; everything about the place indicating responsibility and pride in the condition of his compartment. The other the entrance through brown stone walls, ordinarily rough dressed, entering upon a vestibule and compartment of dark glazed tile with wide black joints; a table in the anteroom, upon which sat a chum of the attendant, smoking and reading a paper, with other papers strewn over the table; the attendant with a remotely once clean white jacket and colored trousers, sloshing a mop around without much regard to the footwear of those using the station, good-naturedly chaffing his chum for being in the way, answering questions perfectly frankly, it is true, but with an easy grace indicating familiarity rather than respect, and with the evident assurance that he held his place by favor, rather than by the way he cared for his station. Your reporter begs also respectfully to suggest that the single word "Men" or "Women," in plain sight, over the respective entrances, is a more modest sign and equally well understood, rather than the flaming legend of "House of Comfort for Women," shown in one city.

I allow myself to make a slight digression before closing to illustrate further the fact that if you give people the opportunity to use sanitary conveniences they will avail themselves of them much more than at first sight might be expected. I show you diagrams taken from a report by Dr. Donald B. Armstrong, Superintendent of the Bureau of Public Health and Hygiene of the Department of Social Welfare of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, illustrating what decent toilet facilities will do in these public convenience stations. *First.* How many people wash their hands? If only cold water is furnished, 28%; if hot and cold water is furnished, 82%; i. e., nearly three times as many. *Second.* If common cake soap was furnished, 16% washed; if soap from a holder, i. e., individual soap, 42% washed; i. e., nearly three times as many also. *Third.* With regard to the use of towels: if no towels were furnished 22% washed their hands; if common towels, i. e., presumably roller towels, 60% washed; if individual towels were furnished, 90% washed; over four times as many.

The opinion is forced upon the writer that New Haven is woefully behind the age in not having an up-to-date, sanitary, well lighted, well ventilated, well cared for public convenience station with pay closets and other reasonable accessories near the center of the city.